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MEMORANDUM

OSD Review
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April 19, 1972
INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. JUSINGER

MORI C05082482

FROM:

Phil Odeen

SUBJECT: Net Assessment of North Vietnamese and
South Vietnamese Military Forces

Secretary Laird has sent you a net assessment prepared at his request by CIA with assistance from DOD (Tab A).

This assessment was completed just as the current offensive opened. It includes little new, but it contains some interesting insights.

External Aid for the NVA

CIA concludes that the USSR and the PRC have always been willing to provide enough military aid to meet North Vietnamese war aims as defined by the North Vietnamese themselves.

On the other hand, external assistance has been reduced, in total value, over recent years and its future path is unknown. If military aid were increased by 25% (\$45 million), it could provide one of the following:

- Ten additional SA-2 battalions (10 were added in 1971);
- About 40 additional MIG-21s or more than 300 additional MIG-17s;
- Almost 400 T-54 medium tanks or 800-900 PT-76 light tanks.

Adding this additional equipment and supporting it would double the level of military aid received in 1971, but would be only two-thirds the assistance received in 1967 -- a level that continues to be well within USSR and PRC capabilities.

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CIA also examined the military implications of a 50% cut in military aid. As current stocks are estimated to be at least 12 months requirements, CIA believes such a cut would have no early effect. On the contrary, however, I think it quite conceivable that a cutback in deliveries, unless the North Vietnamese were certain it was temporary, could force Hanoi to consider reducing the level of combat to conserve its stocks.

In contrast to the overall supply situation, CIA believes a large cut in petroleum deliveries would have an early effect because stocks are only about 90 days' requirements. But, there are large petroleum stocks for civilian requirements and military needs could probably be met by reducing civilian uses.

Forward Deployment and Casualty Replacement

Since December, the NVA has increased its combat OB threatening SVN by about 38,000 to 115,000-130,000. An additional 93,000 men have been infiltrated south but have not yet been included in the enemy OB by CIA. Some are still in the trail system; some will be required for support functions. But most provide a stock of fillers to offset combat casualties.

In short, when considering force ratios and the effect of casualties, you should keep in mind that the enemy has already moved men into position to replace 40,000-60,000 casualties during the current offensive. In addition, replacements for northern MR-1 would presumably move across the DMZ and continued infiltration through Laos is a likely possibility.

Even if the enemy can replace his casualties, the fighting ability of his forces will be degraded -- perhaps critically -- by loss of experienced NCOs and officers.

Enemy Force Levels for 1973

Assuming the enemy loses about 100,000 men this year (typical of years with heavy fighting), the CIA argues that he will almost certainly be unable to launch a campaign next year anywhere near as large as the current one.

We find the CIA conclusion optimistic. CIA states that Hanoi could induct 200,000 men per year for several years before it would exhaust

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its 17-25 manpower pool. Thus, it would appear the enemy could provide replacements for 100,000 casualties or more. The enemy's constraint, now or in 1973, is not number of men but the trained and experienced leadership to use them as an effective fighting force.

RVNAF Strength

In assessing RVNAF strength, the CIA concludes that both in the present period and in early 1973 ARVN should -- from a quantitative point of view -- be able to handle the internal security demands as well as the main force threat. CIA believes RVNAF has more strength than is needed in the south and manpower could be shifted north to build up forces there. The availability of additional manpower in the sparsely populated north is not analyzed, but is probably limited.

To illustrate the current balance, the CIA developed three concepts to guide force ratio comparisons:

-- Main force ratio; forces employed in a main force role including the GVN's newly developed RF battalions.

-- Main and local force ratio; includes RF companies, ARVN forces assigned to pacification and VC local force battalions.

-- Total force ratio; includes PFs and VC local force companies, platoons and guerrillas.

Combat support and combat service support are not included in any measure nor are NVA troops in the pool of fillers awaiting assignment to units.

Comparison of the current situation with 1968 (Tet Offensive) indicates:

-- Main force ratio is the same nation-wide but down substantially everywhere except in MR-4; the greatest drop is in MR-2 but the lowest force level is in MR-1 and the ratio dropped somewhat below 1.9 with the April entry of enemy units not included in the table.

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Table IV-1

Ratio of Allied and VC/NVA Combat Forces
in South Vietnam

First Qtr	MR 1 <u>a/</u>	MR 2	MR 3 <u>b/</u>	MR 4 <u>c/</u>	South Vietnam <u>d/</u>
Main Force Ratio					
1968	2.4	3.3	3.9	2.4	2.9
1970	2.5	7.0	4.5	8.3	4.2
1972	1.9	2.1	7.8 (3.3)	7.4 (4.6)	3.3 (2.8)
Main and Local Force Ratio					
1968	3.5	5.3	6.0	6.1	4.9
1970	3.3	8.3	7.5	10.2	6.5
1972	2.8	4.5	6.7 (4.7)	10.3 (7.8)	5.1 (4.7)
Total Force Ratio					
1968	1.8	2.6	4.1	2.5	2.6
1970	2.5	4.6	5.8	4.4	4.1
1972	2.8	3.8	7.4 (5.6)	6.8 (6.1)	4.8 (4.5)

a. Including NVA combat forces between the DMZ and Dong Hoi, North Vietnam, which represent a threat to the military region.

b. Data in parentheses include adjacent VC/NVA combat forces in Cambodia, the 5th, 7th, and 9th Divisions; the 24th NVA Regiment; and the 271st Independent NVA Regiment. They do not include the possible new division which fragmentary evidence suggests may be in Cambodia.

c. Data in parentheses include adjacent VC/NVA combat forces in Cambodia (roughly a divisional equivalent of the Phuoc Long Front).

d. Saigon General Reserve forces have been assigned as follows: the 369th VNMV Brigade to MR 1 and the First and Third Airborne Brigades to MR 2. Data in parentheses include adjacent VC/NVA combat forces in Cambodia which may be deployed to MRs 3 and 4.

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-- The main and local force ratios dropped in a pattern similar to the main force ratio, but the ratio is substantially more favorable everywhere because the RVNAF has far more strength at the local level than the VC despite considerable NVA infiltration to fill local units.

-- The total force ratio has improved substantially nation-wide since 1968 from 2.6 to 4.5; improvement is substantial in all MRs.

In short, while the main force ratio is the same now as in 1968 and substantially less favorable in the northern MRs, the total force ratio is close to twice as favorable nation-wide and substantially more favorable in the northern MRs. The factors contributing to this are:

-- Destruction of enemy local forces;

-- Build-up of GVN local forces;

-- Continued replacements for enemy main force units which dropped only about 40% in strength since the Tet Offensive;

-- Redeployment of Allied forces and only moderate increase in GVN main force strength (partly because combat units are well under authorized strength), Allied main forces dropped by 50% since 1968 if the new RF battalions are excluded.

What these ratios say is that against all-out enemy attacks, the GVN has substantial force superiority given the total force ratio of 4.8 nation-wide -- a measure of relative strength most relevant when the RF and PF participate in engaging an attacking enemy. However, the GVN is much less well equipped for counter-attack when its main forces would carry most of the fighting burden. Moreover, the enemy often uses its combat support units for offensive purposes.

Net Assessment

Despite its title, the CIA paper is hardly a comprehensive net assessment. It concludes that RVNAF is more numerous and better equipped but the communists are better disciplined, less prone to desert and more determined to fight hard and win.

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Future Work

This net assessment will have to be revised in light of RVNAF and enemy actions in the current offensive. First hand information which General Haig and others are gathering this week will be useful.

Some of the key indicators will be:

- How extensive have RVNAF desertions been;
- How many enemy units have not responded to orders;
- What have the casualty ratios been (an initial ARVN report for April 1-12 of 6,300 enemy killed and less than 1,000 friendly is encouraging but very preliminary);
- What effects would the offensive have on the control situation.

Most important will be GVN efforts not just to hold off the enemy but to destroy him while he is exposed and U. S. air is available. If the enemy retires to his cross-border base areas after a couple of months with his cadre largely intact, he will be able to rebuild for similar offense next year.

Studies underway on the VNAF, U. S. force levels, and longer term RVNAF improvements will also throw more light on some of the assessment points as well as on concrete things we should be doing.

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